

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nov. 7, 2005

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VDH 05-32

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH LAUNCHES VIRGINIA'S
FIRST STATEWIDE TOBACCO CESSATION PROGRAM**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Virginia tobacco users who want to kick the habit have a new tool at their disposal. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has launched a new, statewide toll-free cessation program, called Quit Now Virginia. It is available at (800) QUIT-NOW (784-8669).

Quit Now Virginia provides information and a self-help Quit Kit to all Virginians and provides comprehensive treatment services to Medicaid recipients and the uninsured. Treatment services include a personalized quit plan, a Quit Kit and multiple phone-based treatment sessions with a tobacco treatment specialist.

Callers to the Quitline can speak with a specialist between 8 a.m. and midnight, seven days a week. After midnight, they can listen to topic-specific messages, request a callback or both. Participants can call the program if they need extra support between their scheduled calls.

A 2003 VDH survey estimated that 1.2 million Virginians, or 21.9 percent of the adult population, smoked tobacco. Fifty-two percent said they had tried to stop smoking during the 12 months preceding the survey. Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death in the United States. According to the Virginia Center for Health Statistics, 9,688 Virginians age 35 and older died in 2003 from smoking-related illnesses.

“We plan to promote the Quitline among high-risk populations, including those with chronic diseases such as diabetes and asthma who do not have access to other cessation resources,” said Shawna Shields, prevention services manager for VDH’s Tobacco Use Control Project. “We also plan to implement a fax-referral system that allows health care providers to refer their uninsured or Medicaid patients to the service.”

In addition to helping tobacco users directly, Shields sees the Quitline as a means to reduce the harmful effects of second-hand smoke on workers, family members and children. Second-hand smoke is associated with thousands of new cases of asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia among children, and is linked to increased risks for lung cancer and heart disease among non-smoking adults.

Seattle-based Free & Clear Inc. will operate the Quitline for VDH. Free & Clear is a highly specialized tobacco treatment provider and was chosen for its science-based approach and effectiveness in helping people quit using tobacco.

The Quit Now Virginia service is available in English and Spanish, with access to translation services for callers who speak other languages. A TTY line also is available for the hearing impaired at (877) 777-6534. For more information about Quit Now Virginia, call (800) QUIT-NOW (784-8669), or visit the VDH Web site, www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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